Pasadena COMMUNITY

Johnny's Sport Shop Geared To Tackle All Fishing Needs

By HOLLY UTSUNOMIYA

As the days grow longer and the calendar flips from April to May, fishermen begin dusting off their gear as they prepare for their return to the great outdoors. The High Sierra trout season traditionally begins at the end of April, while deep sea fishermen turn their thoughts to hooking up with the yellowtail and albacore which will soon be inhabiting local waters. Johnny's Sport Shop, a venerable Pasadena institution, has served the fishing needs of the Pasadena community for over 40 years. Here's a look at the store through the eyes of Holly Utsunomiya, granddaughter of Johnny and Itsy Ota, the shop's owners.

Johnny's Sport Shop - 1402 Lincoln Avenue

Johnny's Sport Shop owners: Itsy, Bob, and Johnny Ota

Tucked away in the Northwest corner of Pasadena is Johnny's Sport Shop, a fisherman's candy store. It's a small looking shop from the outside, but you can't just judge a book by it's cover. Inside, from the floors to the ceiling, is an array of fishing tackle displayed with wondrous colors and infinite brand names. Walk into the store and see friendly faces and excited regulars.

Johnny Ota, founder of Johnny's Sport Shop, started his business in his father's market in East Los Angeles in 1947. His father let him use a couple of shelves to house his tackle business. In 1954, Johnny's family, his father and mother, and his brother's family moved to Pasadena where the three families opened Ota's Market, on the corner of Washington Boulevard and Lincoln Avenue.

There was no room for Johnny's fishing tackle business in the market, so he set up shop in his little garage. Soon you could see him running back and forth from the market to his garage to wait on customers. It became apparent that Johnny could no longer work both jobs.

In 1959, Johnny and his wife, Itsy, decided to build the store which exists today. In the early years, they sold a variety of items ranging from, of course, fishing tackle to surfboards, to gym uniforms, to scuba gear and toys. But most of all, they sold Converse shoes in all the colors of the rainbow. Students from the local schools would buy their gym clothes along with matching "Cons", as the shoes were known. And to this day, there are still some calls asking for red Converses.

Although Johnny's Sport Shop is a small, family-owned business, it's a very successful store. It has become one of the largest independent fishing tackle businesses in Southern California. Their loyal customers stretch for four generations. The sport of fishing has become high tech with graphite rods and reels. Many products are made from space age material but you can still find canned bait, and live mealworms, nightcrawlers, crayfish, waxworms and sometimes there are even waterdogs for sale. And let's not forget the frozen packages of anchovies, or as I like to call them, fishcicles.

So, what makes the store so popular and unique? "We try to have every possible type of fishing tackle that an avid fisherman would need for any type of fishing. Our staff is knowledgeable and the total atmosphere of the store is very casual. Our philosophy is to offer our customers good advice and service to guarantee repeat business," quotes Bob, Johnny's son. Everyday, people come in to buy equipment and get recommendations for trips to local fishing holes, as well as exotic places like the Amazon River, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Peru and Australia. Many come back to show off pictures and share stories of the big catches and the ones that got away.

This may seem very comfortable for me to talk about because Johnny and the whole Ota family are related to me. I'm one of his granddaughters. I, too, grew up fishing with the entire family. It has been extremely fun and the experiences have bonded our families ever so much closer.

Today, Johnny is retired and does not participate in the daily operations of the store. He still comes in to check on how the store's doing and to visit with the customers. There are occasions when Johnny is asked on how to tie a better knot, or to solve a perplexing problem on some stubborn reel and rod repairs. Bob takes care of the business now. The fishing tackle industry has become more complex and competitive, but Bob has done well to continue Johnny's philosophy of the store.

Johnny's Sport Shop: 1402 Lincoln Ave; (626) 797-8839

Hours: Mon-Fri 9:00 to 6:00; Sat 9:00 to 5:00; Closed Sunday

Pasonas Celebrate 55th Anniversary

Following the end of World War II, Pasadena became home to a number of Japanese American families. Many young *nisei* of college age attended Pasadena Junior College. In 1945, a group of young *nisei* women going to school there got together and formed a social club. The club became known as the *Pasonas* (derived from 'Pasadena *Onnas*'), a moniker conceived by Esther Takei. Original club members included Grace Sato, Mitsie Koyama, Esther Takei, Mary Aoto, Aki Nakagawa, Tami Kurose, Chickie Ogawa, Foo Hamane, Mary Kawashima, Susie Nishikawa, and Rits Hatashita. The *Pasonas* grew from 15 girls to 30 as members invited non-Pasadena JC friends to join.

Back row: Iris Tanaka Fukutaki, Mary Kawashima Matsumoto, Ida Ikeda Yokoyama, Kay Oshiro Abe, Mitsie Koyama Yanari, Grace Sato Morikawa, Sayo Nakawatase Nakatani, Mary Aoto Chono, Mary Mitsumori Tajima, Mary Yusa Hatate; Front row: Fujiko Sameshima, Tami Hirose Kamei, Ann Hino Fujihara, May Ikeda Ohta, Esther Takei Nishio

The *Pasonas* recently held their 55th reunion luncheon at Sambi Restaurant in Downey. Esther Takei Nishio welcomed former members and their husbands, who enjoyed a buffet lunch and a nostalgic afternoon of visiting with old friends.

In those early days, according to Hiroshi and Tami Kamei, few *nisei* students owned cars, so most walked or took public transportation. Club get togethers were held at member's homes, and activities included skating parties, beach outings, talent shows, and even a hayride at Griffith Park. The club also raised funds for the Pasadena Japanese Community Center. For many years, they sponsored a gala Christmas Eve Ball, which was highlighted by live band music, with the ladies arriving in evening gowns. One of the most successful was held in the grand ballroom of the famous Green Hotel in Pasadena. Many inter-club parties were also held in conjunction with other *nisei* social clubs in Southern California.

As years passed, members moved away, while others married and began raising families. As a result, the club became less active and eventually disbanded. In January, 1980, a "blow the treasury" farewell dinner was held at the Miyako Restaurant in Orange, followed by dessert and an evening of reminiscing at the Kamei home in Anaheim. A 50th Anniversary dinner was held in 1995 at the Athaeneum at Caltech, and everyone had so much fun that they vowed to hold a 55th Anniversary Reunion in 2000, thereby setting the stage for the recent gathering at Sambi's.

Esther Nishio, Hiroshi Kamei, Tami Kamei, and Iris Fukutaki visiting at the *Pasonas* reunion.

Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute Holds Annual Party

On Sunday, April 9, the Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute (PJCI) held its Annual Party at the center's auditorium. Over 125 guests were greeted by this year's President, Bryan Takeda, who opened the program by welcoming everyone and introducing the 2000 PJCI Board of Directors and Cabinet members.

A review of the past year as well as future plans for the center were detailed by Takeda, including an ongoing visioning process and continuing property improvements.

Following a toast by Pasadena Nikkei Seniors President, Kiyoshi Takeda, the guests enjoyed an obento lunch while being entertained by koto instructor Alice Kuramoto. After lunch, the newest member of the PJCI family, Kodama Taiko, entertained everyone with a rousing performance, which featured a piece titled "Ikusa" (Battle). They then concluded their performance with a unique piece which combined pounding mochi (mochitsuki) to the driving beat of their taiko drums.

Darin Nakauchi and Cassandra Zirklebach pound mochi to the driving rhythm of Kodama Taiko.

2000 PJCI Cabinet: President-Bryan Takeda, Vice Presidents-Amy Utsunomiya and Ron Toshima, Treasurer-Toru Hisayasu, Secretaries-Jeannie Toshima and Max Zirkelbach; **PJCI Board of Directors**: Kimiyo Campen, Ron Dyo, Kent Kuramoto, Jane Maruyama-Frausto, Cathy Mikuni, Jim Moore, Hitoshi Sameshima, Shig Takayama, James Yamasaki.

PJCI Schedule of Activities

(These schedules may change, call for current information)

Pasadena Gakuen	(818) 249-0018	Koto Lessons	(626) 441-4475
Saturday Mornings	8:45-12:00	Private & Groups	Saturday morning
Pasadena Aiki-kai	(626) 797-3946	PJAA Bruins	(818) 790-7049
Sunday Mornings	8:30 am	**Call for information**	
Monday, Wednesday	6:00 pm		
Pasadena Kodokan Judo	(626) 963-4206	Pasadena Nikkei Seniors	(626) 359-3780
Tuesday Evenings	7:00 - 8:30 pm	•Karaoke Club	Friday evenings
Saturday Afternoons	3:30 - 5:00 pm	•Exercise Class	Thursdays 3:30 - 4:30 pm
Shodo	(310) 321-9405	•Handicrafts	Wednesday Mornings
Friday Evenings	7:30 pm	•Bridge Club	Wednesdays 10:00 - Noon
Pasadena Kendo Dojo	(626) 795-4437	•Japanese Cooking Class	First Thursday 10:00 - Noon
Friday Evenings	7:30 pm		
Naginata	(818) 790-2246		
Saturday mornings	9:00 am		

Pasadena Gakuen To Host Childrens' Day Celebration

Pasadena Gakuen, in conjunction with the Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute, will be hosting its annual Children's Day Party on Saturday, May 6. Festivities are scheduled to begin at 10:15, and will be highlighted by a performance by Kodama Taiko. The taiko group will not only perform, but also intends to allow the children to participate in a hands-on workshop following their demonstration. A magic show is also scheduled as part of the day's activities. The event is free and the public is invited to attend. The PJCI is located at 595 Lincoln Avenue in Pasadena. For further information, call Max Zirkelbach at 818 249-0018.

Pasadena Buddhist Church Prepares for Chicken Takeout

As you read this, Pasadena Buddhist Church members are already cleaning the grills and readying the BBQ pits as they prepare for their annual Chicken Teriyaki Dinner set for Saturday, May 20. This is TAKEOUT only, and the dinners can be picked up between 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. Cost of the dinner is $7.50 per serving. The church is located at 1993 Glen Avenue, Pasadena.

Pasadena Kendo Dojo Taking New Members in June

The Pasadena Kendo Dojo will have open enrollment in the month of June. Practices are held at the Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute on Friday nights from 7:30 to 10:00. Anyone interested in joining this dojo should call James Yamasaki, head sensei, at (626) 795-4437 for more information.

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